Kimono

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THE CHARACTERS IN THE STORY.

THE HONORABLE GEOFFREY BARRINGTON, son of Lord Brandan, a Captain in the British Army, resigns his commission when he weds

ASAKO FUJINAMI, heiress, daughter of Japanese parents, who are dead, brought up and educated in French convent schools and introduced to London society by

LADY EVERINGTON, a brilliant matchmaker, who did not foresee the result of the bringing together of the two. Lady Everington in her anxiety for the young Captain, who has been her special protege, interviews

COUNT SAITO, the Japanese Ambassador, who tells her the Fujinamis belong to the nouveaux riches of Japan, but gives little information of their origin or the source of their wealth. A visit to his wife's guardians, the Muratas, a Japanese family living in Paris, and a sojourn among the cosmopolitans of Deauville sharpen the desire to see Japan. Aboard the ship they meet

VISCOUNT KAMIMURA, returning home to wed a bride chosen by his family, whom he has never seen. A stop at Nagasaki is the first sight of real Japan. A part of the revelation is the Chonkina, or Geisha dance, seen by Barrington in company with two English acquaintances. Barrington is shocked by the performance.

TANAKA, a nondescript Japanese, attaches himself to the Barringtons, follows them everywhere and accompanies them to Tokyo, where Geoffrey meets

REGGIE FORSYTH, Attache of the British Embassy, musical and romantic, shaking off old attachments in Paris for a new one in Japan, the novelty being

YAE SMITH, daughter of a Japanese mother and an English father. Barrington meets Miss Smith, who smokes and languishes in Forsyth's apartments at the Embassy. Barrington, from a talk with

LADY CYNTHIA CAIRNS, wife of the British Ambassador, learns of Yae's many—some fatal—love affairs and of the Embassy's disapproval of Forsyth's engagement to the young woman.

ITO, lawyer for the Fujinami estate, who has made regular remittances to Mrs. Barrington, arranges for her and her husband to meet the Fujinamis of Tokyo. The entertainments fail to impress Barrington, to whom Japanese family customs seem odd and contradictory. A family business conference discloses the fact that the Fujinami income is derived from the Geisha house privileges in Tokyo and elsewhere. Under the tutelage of her cousin,

ASAKO, Barrington's bride, begins to learn something of Japanese family customs and hear about her father and mother, the one a poet, the other a delicate, clinging little woman, who died when Asako was born. Barrington and Yae Smith are Forsyth's guests at Kamakura. They leave a dance to watch the Japanese peasants on the beach. Yae flirts with Geoffrey, who carries her back to Forsyth's house in his arms. They have been seen by Tanaka. Asako learns from her cousin that childlessness is cause for divorce in Japan. She spends much time in the Fujinami household. Forsyth surprises Geoffrey and Yae Smith in his own rooms. Geoffrey declares his innocence; the girl accuses him, and in a violent tirade gives Barrington his first knowledge of the source of his wife's income. Asako learns of the incident and turns a deaf ear to her husband's explanations and pleas for forgiveness. Under persuasion by Ito, Barrington signs a document which divorces Asako. He returns to England. Asako too, learns of the source of her income and becomes disgusted with Japanese customs.

CHAPTER XXIV. (Continued.)

The Autumn Festival.

ASAKO no longer felt like a Japanese. The sight of her countrymen in their drab monotonous thousands sickened her. The hiss and cackle of their incomprehensible tongue beat upon her brain with a deadly incessant sound, like raindrops to one who is impatiently awaiting the return of fine weather.

Here at Ikegami, the distant view of the sea and the Yokohama shipping invited Asako to escape. But where could she escape to? To England. She was an English woman no longer. She had cast her husband off for insufficient reasons. She had been cold, loveless, narrow-minded and silly. She had acted, as she now recognized, largely on the suggestion of others. Like a fool she had believed what had been told. She had not trusted her love for her husband. As usual, her thoughts returned to Geoffrey, and to the constant danger which threatened him. Lately, she had started to write a letter to him several times, but had never got further than "Dearest Geoffrey."

She was glad when the irritating day was over, when the rosy sunset clouds showed through the trunks of the cryptomerias, when the night fell and the great stars like lamps hung in the branches. But the night brought no silence. Paper lanterns were lighted round the temple, and rough acetylene flares lit up the tawdry fairings. The chattering, the bargaining, the clatter of the geta became more terrifying even than in daytime. It was like being in the darkness in a cage of wild beasts, heard, felt, but unseen.

The evening breeze was cold. In spite of the big wooden fireboxes strewn over their stall, the Fujinami were shivering.

"Let us go for a walk," suggested Cousin Sadako.

The two girls strolled along the ridge of the hill as far as the five-storied pagoda. They passed the tea-house, so famous for its plum-blossoms in early March. It was brightly lighted. The paper rectangles of the shoji were aglow like an illuminated honeycomb. The wooden walls resounded with the jangle of the samisen, the high screaming geisha voices, and the rough laughter of the guests. From one room the shoji were pushed open; and drunken men could be seen with kimonos thrown back from their shoulders showing a body reddened with sake. They had taken the geishas' instruments from them, and were performing an impromptu song and dance, while the girls clapped their hands and writhed with laughter. Beyond the tea-house, the din of the festival was hushed. Only from the distance came the echo of the song, the rasp of the forced merriment, the clatter of the geta, and the hum of the crowd.

Starlight revealed the landscape. The moon was rising through a cloud's liquescence. Soon the hundreds of rice-plots would catch her full reflection. The outline of the coast of Tokio Bay was visible as far as Yokohama; so were the broad pool of Ikegami and the lumpy masses of the hills inland.

The landscape was alive with lights, lights dim, lights bright, lights stationary, lights in swaying movement round each centre of population. It looked as if the stars had fallen from heaven, and were being shifted and sorted by careful gleaners.

As each nebula of white illumination assembled itself, it began to move across the vast plain, drawn inwards toward Ikegami from every point of the compass as though by a magnetic force. These were the lantern processions of pilgrims. They looked like the souls of the righteous rising from earth to heaven in a canto from Dante.

The clusters of lights started, moved onwards, paused, regrouped themselves and struggled forward, until in the narrow street of the village under the hill Asako could distinguish the shapes of the lantern-bearers and their strange antics, and the sacred palanquin, a kind of enormous wooden beehive, which was the centre of each procession, borne on the sturdy shoulders of a swarm of young men to the beat of drums and the inevitable chant.

Namu myoho renge kyo.

Slowly the procession jolted up the steep stairway and came to rest with their heavy burdens in front of the temple of Nichiren.

"It is very silly," said Cousin Sadako, "to be so superstitious, I think."

"Then why are we here?" asked Asako.

"My grandfather is very superstitious; and my father is afraid to say 'No' to him. My father does not believe in any gods or Buddhas; but he says it does no harm, and it may do good. All our family is gohei-katsugi (brandishers of sacred symbols). We think that with all this prayer we can turn away the trouble of Takeshi."

"Why, what is the matter with Mr. Takeshi? Why is he not here? and Matsuko San and the children?"

"It is a great secret," said the Fujinami cousin, "you will tell no one. You will pretend also even with me that you do not know. Takeshi San is very sick. The doctor says that he is a leper."

Asako stared, uncomprehending. Sadako went on:

"You saw this morning those ugly beggars. They were all so terrible to see. My brother is becoming like that. It is a sickness. It cannot be cured. It will kill him very slowly. Perhaps his wife Matsu and his children also have the sickness. Perhaps we too are sick. No one can tell, not for many years."

Ugly wings seemed to cover the night. The world beneath the hill had become the Pit of Hell, and the points of light were devils' spears. Asako trembled.

"What does it mean" she asked. "How did Takeshi San become sick?"

"It was a tenbatsu (judgment of heaven)," answered her cousin. "Takeshi San was a bad man. He was rude to his father, and he was cruel to his wife. He thought only of geisha and bad women. No doubt he became sick from touching a woman who was sick. Besides, it is the bad inge of the Fujinami family. Did not the old woman of Akabo say so? It is the curse of the Yoshiwara women. It will be our turn next, yours and mine."

No wonder that poor Asako could not sleep that night in the cramped promiscuity of the family dead.

Fujinami Takeshi had been sickly for some time; but then his course of life could hardly be called a healthy one. Prof. Kashio had been called in to prescribe. A blood test was taken. The doctor then pronounced that the son and heir was suffering from leprosy, and for that there was no cure.

In the village of Kusatsu, beyond the Kartuizawa Mountains, there is a natural hot spring whose waters are beneficial for the alleviation of the disease. In this place there is a settlement of well-to-do lepers. Thither it was decided to banish poor Takeshi. His wife, Matsuko, naturally was expected to accompany him, to nurse him and to make life as comfortable for him as she could. Her eventual doom was almost certain. But there was no question, no choice, no hesitation and no praise. Every Japanese wife is obliged to become an Alcestis, if her husband's well being demand it. The children were sent to the ancestral village of Akabo.

misfortune was situated in the north-east corner of the mansion, a quarter notoriously exposed to the attacks of oni (evil spirits). He was in favor of total demolishment.

This was only one of the differences of opinion between the two seniors of the house of Fujinami, which became more frequent as the clouds of disaster gathered over the home in Akasaka. A far more thorny problem was the question of the succession.

With the living death of Takeshi, there was no male heir. Several family councils were held in the presence of the two Mr. Fujinami generally in the lower-house, at which six or seven members of the collateral branches were also present. Grandfather Gennosuke, who despised Takeshi as a waster, would not listen to any plea on behalf of his children.

"To a bad father a bad child," he enunciated, his restless jaw masticating more ferociously than ever.

He was strongly of opinion that it was the curse of Asako's father which had brought this sorrow upon his family. Katsundo and Asako were representatives of the elder branch. Himself, Gentaro and Takeshi were mere usurpers. Restore the elder branch to its rights and the indignant ghost would cease to plague them all.

Such was the argument of grandfather Gennosuke.

Fujinami Gentaro naturally supported the claims of his own progjeny. If Takeshi's children were disinherited because of the leprous strain, then, at least, Sadako remained. She was a well-educated and serious girl

"SHE DREW FROM THE BOSOM OF HER KIMONO THE SHORT SWORD IN ITS SHEATH OF SHAGREEN."

CHAPTER XXV.

Japanese Courtship.

O-bune no
Hatsuru-tomari no
Tayutai ni
Mono-omoi-yase no
Hito no ko yuye ni.

With a rocking
(As) of great ships
Riding at anchor
I have at last become worn out with love
Because of a child of man.

WHEN the Fujinami returned to Tokio, the wing of the house in which the unfortunate son had lived had been demolished. An ugly scar remained, a slab of charred concrete strewn with ashes and burned beams. Saddest sight of all was the twisted iron work of Takeshi's foreign bedstead, once the symbol of progress and of the haikara spirit. The fire was supposed to have been accidental; but the ravages had been carefully limited to the offending wing.

Mr. Fujinami Gentaro, disgusted at this unsightly wreckage, wished to rebuild at once. But the old grandfather had objected that this spot of

She knew foreign languages. She could make a brilliant marriage. Her husband would be adopted as heir. Perhaps the Governor of Osako?

The other members of the council shook their heads, and breathed deeply. Were there no Fujinami left of the collateral branches? Why adopt a tanin (outside persons)? So spoke the M. P., the man with a wen, who had an axe of his own to grind.

It was decided to choose the son-in-law candidate first of all; and, afterwards, to decide which of the girls he was to marry. Perhaps it would be as well to consult the fortune tellers. At any rate, a list of suitable applicants would be prepared for the next meeting.

"When men speak of the future," said Grandfather Gennosuke, "the rats in the ceiling laugh."

So the conference broke up.

Mr. Fujinami Gentaro had no sooner returned to the academic calm of his chaste reading room than Mr. Ito appeared on the threshold.

The oily face was more moist than usual, the buffalo-horn moustache more truculent; and though the autumn day was cool, Ito was agitating a fan. He was evidently nervous. Before approaching the sanctum he had blown his nose into a small square piece of soft paper, which is the Japanese apology for a handkerchief.

M. Fujinami frowned. He was tired of business matters and the worry of other people's affairs. He longed for peace.

"Indeed, the weather becomes perceptibly cooler," said Mr. Ito with a low prostration.

"If there is business," his patron replied crispiy, "please step up into the room."

Mr. Ito slipped off his geta, and ascended from the garden path. When he had settled himself in the correct attitude with legs crossed and folded, Mr. Fujinami pushed over toward him a packet of cigarettes, adding:

"Please, without embarrassment, speak quickly what you have to say."

Mr. Ito chose a cigarette, and slowly pinched together the cardboard holder, which formed its lower half.

"Indeed, sensei, it is a difficult matter," he began. "It is a matter which should be handled by an intermediary. If I speak face to face like a foreigner the master will excuse my rudeness."

"Please speak clearly."

"I owe my advancement in life entirely to the master. I was an emigrant and a vagabond over three thousand worlds. The master gave me a home and lucrative employment. I have served the master for many years; with my poor effort the fortunes of the family have perhaps increased. I have become as it were a son to the Fujinami."

He paused at the word "son." His employer had caught his meaning, and was frowning more than ever. At last he answered:

"To expect too much is a dangerous thing. To choose a *yoshi* (adopted son) is a difficult question. I myself cannot decide such grave matters. There must be consultation with the rest of the Fujinami family. You yourself have suggested that Gov. Sugiwara might perhaps be a suitable person."

"At that time the talk was of Sada San; this time the talk is of Asa San."

A flash of inspiration struck Mr. Fujinami Gentaro, and a gush of relief. By giving her to Ito, he might be able to sidetrack Asako, and leave the highway to inheritance free for his own daughter. But Ito had grown too powerful to be altogether trusted.

"It must be clearly understood," said the master, "that it is the husband of our Sada who will be the Fujinami *yoshi*."

Ito bowed.

"Thanks to the master," he said, "there is money in plenty. There is no desire to speak of such matters. The request is for Asa San only. Truly, the heart is speaking. That girl is a beautiful child, and altogether a *haikara* person. My wife is old and barren and of low class. I wish to have a wife who is worthy of my position in the house of Fujinami San."

The head of the family cackled with sudden laughter; he was much relieved.

"Ha Ha! Ito Kun! So it is love, is it? You are in love like a school student. Well, indeed, love is a good thing. What you have said shall be well considered."

So the lawyer was dismissed.

Accordingly, at the next family council, Mr. Fujinami put forward the proposal that Asako should be married forthwith to the family factotum, who should be given a lump sum down in consideration for a surrender of all further claim in his own name or his wife's to any share in the family capital.

"Ito Kun," he concluded, "is the brain of our business. He is the family *karo* (prime minister). I think it would be well to give this Asa to him."

To his surprise, the proposal met with unanimous opposition. The rest of the family envied and disliked Ito, who was regarded as Mr. Fujinami's pampered favorite.

Grandfather Gennosuke was especially indignant.

"What?" he exploded in one of those fits of rage common to old men in Japan; "give the daughter of the elder branch to a butler, to a man whose father ran between rickshaw shafts! If the spirit of Katsundo has not heard this foolish talk it would be a good thing for us. Already there is a bad *inge*. By doing such a thing it will become worse and worse, until the whole house of Fujinami is ruined. This Ito is a rascal, a thief, a good-for-nothing, a"——

The old gentleman collapsed.

Again the council separated, still undecided except for one thing—that the claim of Mr. Ito to the hand of Asako was quite inadmissible.

When the "family prime minister" next pressed his master on the subject, Mr. Fujinami had to confess that the proposal had been rejected.

Then Ito unmasked his batteries, and his patron had to realize that the servant was a servant no longer.

Ito said that it was necessary for him to have Asa San, and that before the end of the year. He was in love with this girl. Passion was an overwhelming thing.

"Two things have ever been the same
Since the Age of the Gods—
The flowing of water,
And the way of Love."

This old Japanese poem he quoted as his excuse for what would otherwise be an inexcusable impertinence. The master was aware that politics in Japan were in an unsettled state, and that the new Cabinet was scarcely established; that a storm would overthrow it, and that the Opposition were already looking about for a suitable scandal to use for their revenge. He, Ito, held the evidence which they desired—the full story of the Tobita concession, with the names and details of the enormous bribes distributed by the Fujinami. If these things were published, the Government would certainly fall; also the Tobita concession would be lost and the whole of that great outlay; also the Fujinami's leading political friends would be discredited and ruined. There would be a big trial, and exposure, and outcry, and judgment, and prison. The master must excuse his servant for speaking so rudely to his benefactor. But in love there are no scruples; and he must have Asa San. After all, after his long service, was his request so unreasonable?

Mr. Fujinami Gentaro, thoroughly scared, protested that he himself was in favor of the match. He begged for time so as to be able to convert the other members of the family council.

"Perhaps," suggested Ito, "if Asa San were sent away from Akasaka; perhaps if she were living alone, it would be more easy to manage. What is absent is soon forgotten. Mr. Fujinami Gennosuke is a very old gentleman; he would soon forget. Sada San could then take her proper position as the only daughter of the Fujinami. Was there not a small house by the river side at Mukojima, which had been rented for Asa San? Perhaps she would like to live there—quite alone."

"Perhaps Ito Kun would visit her from time to time," said Mr. Fujinami, pleased with the idea; "she will be so lonely; there is no knowing."

The one person who was never consulted, and who had not the remotest notion of what was going on, was Asako herself.

Asako was most unhappy. The disappearance of Fujinami Takeshi exasperated the competition between herself and her cousin. Just as formerly all Sadako's intelligence and charm had been exerted to attract her English relative to the house in Akasaka so now she applied all her force to drive her cousin out of the family circle. For many weeks now Asako had been ignored; but after the return from Ikegami a positive persecution commenced. Although the nights were growing chilly, she was given no extra bedding. Her meals were no longer served to her; she had to get what she could from the kitchen. The servants, imitating their mistress's attitude, were deliberately disobliging and rude to the little foreigner.

Sadako and her mother would sneer at her awkwardness and at her ignorance of Japanese customs. Her obi was tied anyhow; for she had no maid. Her hair was untidy; for she was not allowed a hairdresser.

They nicknamed her rashamen (goat face), using an ugly slang word for a foreigner's Japanese mistress; and they would pretend that she smelled like a European.

The war even was used to hurt Asaka. Every German success was greeted with acclamation. The exploits of the Emden were loudly praised; and the tragedy of Coronel was gloated over with satisfaction.

"The Germans will win because they are brave," said Sadako.

"The English lose too many prisoners; Japanese soldiers are never taken prisoner."

"When the Japanese General ordered the attack on Tsingtao, the English regiment ran away!"

Cousin Sadako announced her intention of studying German.

"Nobody will speak English now," she said. "The English are disgraced. They cannot fight."

"I wish Japan would make war on the English," Asako answered bitterly, "you would get such a beating that you would never boast again. Look at my husband," she added proudly; "he is so big and strong and brave. He could pick up two or three Japanese Generals like toys and knock their heads together."

Even Mr. Fujinami Gentaro joined once or twice in these debates, and announced sententiously:

"Twenty years ago Japan defeated China, and took Korea. Ten years ago we defeated Russia and took Manchuria. This year we defeat Germany and take Tsingtao. In ten years we shall defeat America and take Hawaii and the Philippines. In twenty years we shall defeat England and take India and Australia. Then we Japanese shall be the most powerful nation in the world. This is our divine mission."

It was characteristic of the loyalty of Asako's nature, that, although very ignorant of the war, of its causes and its vicissitudes, yet she remained fiercely true to England and the Allies, and could never accept the Japanese detachment. Above all, the thought of her husband's danger haunted her. Waking and sleeping she could see him, sword in hand, leading his men to desperate hand-to-hand struggles, like those portrayed in the crude Japanese chromographs, which Sadako showed her to play upon her fears. Poor Asako! How she hated Japan now! How she loathed the cramped, draughty, uncomfortable life! How she feared the smiling faces and the watchful eyes, from which is seemed she never could escape!

Christmas was at hand, the season of spelty presents and good things to eat. Her last Christmas she had spent with Geoffrey on the Riviera. Lady Everington had been there. They had watched the pigeon shooting in the warm sunlight. They had gone to the opera in the evening—"Madame Butterfly"!

Asako had imagined herself in the role of the heroine, so gentle, so faithful, waiting and waiting in her little wooden house for the big white husband—who never came. What was that? She heard the guns of his ship saluting the harbor. He was coming back to her at last—but not alone! A woman was with him, a white woman!

Alone, in her bare room—her only companion a flaky yellow chrysanthemum nodding in the draught—Asako sobbed and sobbed as though her heart were breaking. Somebody tapped at the sliding shutter. Asako could not answer. The shoji was pushed open, and Tanaka entered.

Asako was glad to see him. Alone of the household Tanaka was still deferential in his attitude towards his late mistress. He was always ready to talk about the old time which gave her a bitter pleasure.

"If Ladyship is so sad," he began, as he had been coached in his part beforehand by the Fujinami, "why Ladyship stay in this house? Change house, change trouble, we say."

"But where can I go?" Asako asked helplessly.

"Ladyship has pretty house by river brink," suggested Tanaka. "Ladyship can stay two month, three month. Then the springtime come and Ladyship feel quite happy again. Even I, in the winter season, I find the mind very distress. It is often so."

To be alone, to be free from the daily insults and cruelty; this in itself would be happiness to Asako.

"But will Mr. Fujinami allow me to go?" she asked, timorously.

"Ladyship must be brave," said the counsellor. "Ladyship is not prisoner. Ladyship must say, I go. But perhaps I can arrange matter for Ladyship."

"Oh, Tanaka, please do. I'm so unhappy here."

"I will hire cook and maid for Ladyship. I myself will be seneschal!"

Mr. Fujinami Gentaro and his family were delighted to hear that their plan was working so smoothly, and that they could so easily get rid of their embarrassing cousin. The "seneschal" was instructed at once to see about arrangements for the house, which had not been lived in since its new tenancy.

Next evening, when Asako had spread the two quilts on the golden matting, when she had lit the rush-light in the square andon, when the two girls were lying side by side under the heavy wadded bedclothes, Sadako said to her cousin:

"Asa Chan, I do not think you like me now as much as you used to like me."

"I always like people when I have once liked them," said Asako; "but everything is different now."

"I see, your heart changes quickly," said her cousin bitterly.

"No, I have tried to change, but I cannot change. I have tried to become Japanese, but I cannot even learn the Japanese language. I do not like the Japanese way of living. In France and in England I was always happy. I don't think I shall ever be happy again."

"You had better marry a Japanese," said Sadako, "or you will become an old maid. Why not marry Ito San? He says he likes you. He is a clever man. He has plenty of money. He is used to foreign ways."

"Marry Mr. Ito!" Asako exclaimed, aghast. "But he has a wife already."

"They will divorce. It is no trouble. There are not even children."

"I would rather die than marry any Japanese," said Asako with conviction.

Sadako Fujinami turned her back and pretended to sleep; but long through the dark, cold night Asako could feel her turning restlessly to and fro.

Some time about midnight Asako heard her name called:

"Asa Chan, are you awake?"

"Yes; is anything the matter?"

"Asa Chan, in your house by the river you will be lonely. You will not be afraid?"

"I am not afraid to be lonely," Asako answered; "I am afraid of people."

"Look!" said her cousin; "I give you this."

She drew from the bosom of her kimono the short sword in its sheath of shagreen, which Asako had seen once or twice before.

"It is very old," she continued; "it belonged to my mother's people. They were samurai of the Sendai clan. In old Japan every noble girl carried such a short sword; for she said, 'Better death than dishonor.' When the time came to die she would strike—here, in the throat, not too hard, but pushing strongly. But first she would tie her feet together with the obidome, the silk string which you have to hold your obi straight. That was in case the legs open too much; she must not die in immodest attitude. So when General Nogo did harakiri at Emperor Meiji's funeral, his wife, Countess Nogi, killed herself also with such a sword. I give you my sword because in the house by the river you will be lonely—and things might happen. I can never use the sword myself now. It was the sword of my ancestors. I am not pure now. I cannot use the sword. If I kill myself I throw myself into the river like a common geisha. I think it is best you marry Ito. In Japan it is bad to have a husband; but to have no husband, it is worse."

(Continued To-morrow.)